

~~SECRET NOFORN~~

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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
HEADQUARTERS TACTICAL AIR COMMAND  
LANGLEY AIR FORCE BASE, VIRGINIA 23665



OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER

9 August 1977

Executive Registry  
77-7745/3

Admiral Stansfield Turner  
Director of Central Intelligence  
Washington, DC 20505

Dear Stan

(S-NOFORN) I was pleased to receive your 1 July letter and to know you found our appraisal of the briefing useful. I was especially concerned that the briefing was being presented to congressional committees and other decision makers.

(S-NOFORN) As to my concern over the "positive position the briefing took on the superiority of NATO pilots and on the level of Soviet/Pact air force manning," my main problem is with the approach taken to arrive at the conclusions. The analysis was apparently based on fragmented data (not all of which are supported by our holdings) which indicate a grossly inferior Pact pilot, hence air, capability.

(S-NOFORN) I am aware of the difficulty in assessing the "quality" of our adversary, and particularly the "human" factor. Nevertheless, I am convinced the quality issue has not been adequately considered in the equation, and current approaches, as reflected by the briefing, fail to integrate cumulative factors into a total force correlation. It is not sufficient to reassure ourselves that our people are individually more proficient and better equipped than the opponent; we must also evaluate how good the opponent is in terms of how good he needs to be to achieve his objectives. While Soviet pilots are tightly controlled in training, so are ours. They are still professional airmen, and they are improving their training programs in operational units. There are areas where they actually have a training edge. For example, they fly more training sorties than our pilots and receive more simulator training. The fact that at any point in time individual Soviet air regiments may have ten, twenty, or even thirty percent of their aircrews who are not fully "combat qualified" is important for any force posture analysis; however, in time of war this still translates into the same total force to counter. Our units average 15 to 20 percent not fully "combat qualified" aircrews, but in war they will fight.

USAF review(s)  
completed.

To RADM Ebelard  
for action 19 Aug 77

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(S-NOFORN) Regarding the quality of non-U.S. NATO pilots, I am intrigued by the possibility -- and the delicacy -- of a quality assessment and comparison of our NATO tactical air forces. I indorse the utility of a better appreciation of our own force "quality." However, the development of requisite criteria and standards necessary for such a study, in conjunction with the unavoidable transgression of individual national sensitivities, might overwhelm the most zealous analyst. If anyone ventures forth, we would welcome an opportunity to review the outcome.

(S-NOFORN) There has been much recent reappraisal in the intelligence community concerning the likelihood and degree of Warsaw Pact mobilization and augmentation of tactical air forces in a war. The evidence available to us indicates an increasing capability to strike with in-place assets. While we agree Pact tactical aviation is not (and has not been) structured in manning and maintenance capabilities to support a protracted conventional conflict, we believe support for a relatively short but decisive conflict scenario is present and has been thought out by Soviet planners. The Soviets may not be able to do what we can do for as long as we can do it -- in terms of supporting tactical air forces in wartime -- but, in our view, they probably don't intend to "do it" for very long.

(S-NOFORN) Regarding the MITRE Study you mentioned, the methodology used has merit, especially in that it is closer to the force-on-force comparison approach I believe is necessary. However, the study is weak in supportive reasoning; and, since it is based on obsolete data, its major conclusion is invalid, i.e., Soviet Frontal Aviation offensive capability is extremely limited.

(S-NOFORN) The evolution of Soviet Frontal Aviation from an almost totally defensive force to one with a significant offensive capability is now a fact and the implications are dramatic. In addition to the range/payload improvements resulting from the introduction of new aircraft, the quality gap in avionics and weapons has narrowed. Soviet Frontal Aviation now has precision guided munitions, MERs, sophisticated avionic suites, improved navigation systems, and cluster munitions. These improvements, coupled with a widening quantitative advantage, have significantly improved Frontal Aviation's offensive capability.

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(S-NOFORN) The author's denigration of the Pact pilots' capabilities weighs too heavily on the study's conclusions. Describing the Soviet pilot as an inflexible near-robot, unable to think for himself, and no better than the Arabs (as implied in the study), is foolhardy and not supported by reasoning or current evidence.

(S-NOFORN) I would encourage efforts to redo the study using current NATO and Pact aircraft inventories and capabilities. Any new study must stress a short/no-warning Pact attack scenario, since the Soviets are aware that such a scenario offers them a clear numerical advantage and the best chance for success.

(U) I appreciate your soliciting my views. I would emphasize that we don't pretend to know how tall Ivan is, but based on what we see here, he appears to be growing. We need your help in obtaining the most accurate and timely assessment possible so that we can adequately posture and train the force.

(U) Best wishes to you and Pat in your gigantic job. It is clear that you have a bear by the throat in one hand and a tiger in the other.

Sincerely



ROBERT J. DIXON, General, USAF  
Commander

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